

**APRIL 1, 2011 TESTIMONY OF
KIA LEVEY
FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
REGARDING
RAISED HB 6634: AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD WELFARE AND DETENTION IN THE
JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND ERASURE OF JUVENILE RECORDS**

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee: This testimony is submitted by Kia Levey, graduate student at University of Connecticut School of Social Work and concerned citizen and parent advocating for the fair and equitable treatment of youth in the juvenile justice system.

I am testifying in support of Raised HB 6634, which addresses Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) in the state's juvenile justice system. In particular, I am emphasizing my support for **Sections 1 and 6, which have been previously analyzed by OFA to require no fiscal expenditures to attain**. These would implement two recommendations of the Governor-appointed Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee:

- (Section 1) Neutral third-party approval for all juvenile detention facility admissions, and
- (Section 6) Annual reports from designated agencies on DMC-related plans and progress.

I believe that all young people should be held accountable for their behavior, in a way that is fair and equal – they should be treated the same, regardless of race or ethnicity. As a life long resident of Connecticut, growing up in New Haven I witnessed too many of my peers and classmates who looked like me and lived where I lived arrested and incarcerated at an alarming rate. I had no idea at the time that these rates were significantly larger than our white counterparts. Most of these young people were unable to finish school; they were separated from their families, and most times were unable to reengage with their communities. Now, as an engaged citizen, the parent of an African American son and a student studying social policy and social justice, I am more fully aware of the prevalence of discriminatory practices that increase and/or exacerbate the penalization of youth of color. This bill is about legislating fairness, fairness in a process that is already loaded with fear and grief and remorse. I support Raised HB 6634, Sections 1 and 6, and believe it will make a difference.

We know that DMC exists in Connecticut. Solid research informs the recommendations in HB 6634. The research examines the decisions made at the point of arrest, confinement, and conviction, controlling for factors like a prior juvenile system involvement and socioeconomic status. The analysis shows the existence, or absence, of DMC at these specific “decision points” across the system. This helps us determine what specific steps we can take to alleviate any disproportionality found. The difference in how young people of color are treated is not explained by any other reason beyond DMC: the research controls for a child's family background, criminal record, and numerous other variables.

I support HB 6634 because it will protect young people of color, like my son from being penalized for more than just their behavior; protect them from being unfairly treated because of their race and ethnicity; and give them the fairness that a just process should provide.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information.

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